

the old brag of my heart by TolkienGirl

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Angst, Character Study, F/M, Gen, Non-Linear Narrative, briefly referenced sex, spanning both seasons, title is from Sylvia Plath

Language: English

Characters: Nancy Wheeler

Relationships: Barbara "Barb" Holland & Nancy Wheeler, Jonathan Byers/Nancy Wheeler, Karen Wheeler & Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington/Nancy Wheeler

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Summary:

The worst moment of every day is when you shut out the lights.

the old brag of my heart

You remember it like this: you are five years old, and your mom isn't crying.

You only think she might want to.

You remember it like this: you are fourteen, and you sneak down a glass of Barb's dad's bourbon because you want to say you knew how to.

You cough. Barb's mom comes into the kitchen. Barb gets in trouble.

You are only ashamed because you coughed.

You remember it like this: Barb dies when you are screwing Steve Harrington.

It was your plan all along. Not Barb dying, of course.

But Barb was a means to an end, and then she became an end.

You didn't miss her until it was too late.

Your room is pink and soft and sometimes you want to tear it all to pieces. But mostly, you don't. You hang your posters and curl your hair and you flip your eyelids up-down-up without being taught how.

You are good at this.

Your life is centered on you. You are the oldest. Pretty, smart, loved by your mom, without having to spend much time loving her back.

There is no example of that. You are all in very calm, unhappy orbits.

Steve Harrington looks like danger, and you need him.

And all the little corners of wanting him—the inch of skin between belt and t-shirt when he stretches, the twist of his smirk, the way that boys always have longer eyelashes than girls do—

You need those too.

It turns out danger is something else.

Danger is waking up, half-warm, half-cold, *all over*—

Steve doesn't wake up. If he did, you might not have felt so lonely.

Danger is Barb's car, empty like only coffins are empty.

Danger is Jonathan Byers with his soft eyes and hard bones.

Danger is the woods at night, and the rain-wet secrets of the matted leaves, and the gutturing whine of the *thing*, splitting the air like a hairline fracture.

Danger *is*.

You want Jonathan. You don't admit it.

(Steve came first.)

You want freedom. You don't know what it looks like, only that it is somewhere else.

(Steve came first, and you wanted him, and he used to be the only danger, but it wasn't nearly enough.)

Barb's funeral is not even the worst day of your life.

You do not believe in God. Sometimes you believe in sunsets.

They are softer, somehow, than you deserve.

The worst moment of every day is when you shut out the lights.

The day becomes an end. An end unto itself.

You remember it like this: high school is a lie.

Nobody understands what's really happening, and how are you supposed to read poetry and history when they are nothing that you need, even when the words and lives that skip across the pages come eerily close to your own dualities?

Jonathan understands.

Steve wants to.

You don't know which is worse.

Your mother still loves you.

You wish you had loved her better.

You no longer have time.